

## Danielle Roos

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# DANIELLE ROOS

At first, Danielle Roos ('10) thought theatre might be a fun side-gig—a hobby. “Honestly, I was kind of afraid to commit my life to it,” she says.

When she was a student at Dordt, she learned to see theatre through new eyes.

“From the very beginning, my professors were challenging us to think about what stories are important for us to tell,” she says.

Since then, Roos has committed her life to telling those stories. After graduating from Dordt, Roos started her own theatre company, Yellow Rose Productions, in Knoxville, Tennessee. In 2015, a play she co-wrote and directed was accepted into the prestigious New York City Fringe festival, the largest multi-arts festival in North America.

*Princess Cut* tells the true story of a Knoxville woman who, as a young girl, was a victim of sex trafficking.

“I was introduced to this young woman, and as we became closer, she told me her story,” Roos says. As a five-year-old, the woman was exploited by an older male cousin, her babysitter, who was involved in a sex ring in one of the city’s suburban



neighborhoods.

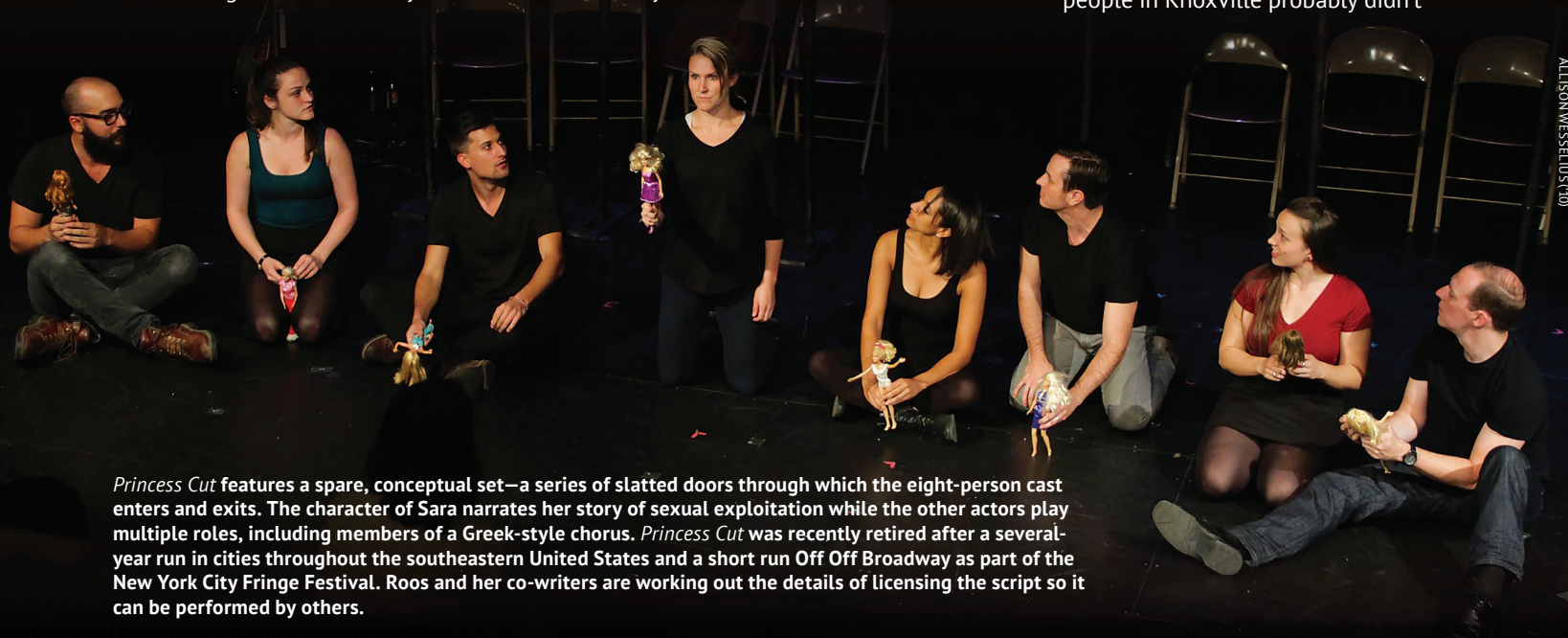
“People often think of sex trafficking as something that happens in far-off places, like Asia, but her story shows it could be happening in the house next door,” she says. The woman wanted to tell her

story, so Yellow Rose Productions began working with her to write a play.

“We thought, ‘Knoxville needs to hear this story. We can’t hear this story and not tell it,’” says Roos. She and two co-writers sat down with the woman, often talking late into the night, to piece together a story. Eventually, they were surrounded by Post-it notes with plot points and scene descriptions.

“When we first performed the play, we’d scheduled a one-night show in a little venue downtown,” she says. “We’d set up chairs for about 50, but we had 199 people cram into the space.” Members of the press showed up, and shortly after that, a Knoxville paper ran a large feature about sex trafficking in the area. Interest was so great, they eventually performed the show in cities across the Southeast.

Roos and her team soon began to realize they didn’t really know what trafficking looked like at the local level—and most people in Knoxville probably didn’t



*Princess Cut* features a spare, conceptual set—a series of slatted doors through which the eight-person cast enters and exits. The character of Sara narrates her story of sexual exploitation while the other actors play multiple roles, including members of a Greek-style chorus. *Princess Cut* was recently retired after a several-year run in cities throughout the southeastern United States and a short run Off Off Broadway as part of the New York City Fringe Festival. Roos and her co-writers are working out the details of licensing the script so it can be performed by others.

“We thought, ‘Knoxville needs to hear this story. We can’t hear this story and not tell it.’”

– Danielle Roos ('10), playwright, producer, and founder of Yellow Rose Productions



DORDT COLLEGE ARCHIVES

Roos in *Enchanted April*, performed at Dordt College in 2009. Roos and her co-producers are currently writing a play about the criminal justice system that addresses how difficult it can be for people convicted of a felony to start a new life.

either. “We didn’t want people to leave and think, ‘Oh, that’s just a story. It’s fiction.’ We wanted to honor her story by giving people resources to better understand and respond to the issue,” she says. So after each performance, they asked a panel of experts to debrief the audience, including law enforcement officers, an FBI victim specialist, and providers of mental health care and other forms of aftercare for victims.

Roos learned this practice of post-show discussion while a theatre student at Dordt. “It’s a great way to open up a space for dialog about really difficult and challenging subjects. People often leave with more questions than answers, but it starts a conversation,” she says.

“We didn’t intend this to be a Christian play, but the woman we’ve called ‘Sara’ grew up in the church and wanted to address the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of the church in responding to her situation as a victim of sex trafficking,” Roos says. Discussions about sexual purity in her church left her feeling alienated and kept her from seeking help due to feelings of shame. “We wanted to highlight where she was helped by the church and where the church could do better,” Roos says.

As a student, Roos didn’t shy away from difficult subjects. Among other projects, she produced a documentary about domestic violence, and she directed a staged reading of *The Laramie Project*, about a young gay man, Matthew Shephard, who was murdered in 1998. She has continued to tackle challenging subjects as a playwright and producer, and she says that writing and performing a play like *Princess Cut* can build empathy among audience members and, ultimately, be a way to seek justice for vulnerable and oppressed people.

“There’s an energy that happens in the theatre—an electricity in the air,” she says. “As an audience member, you’re so close. You’re watching the actors’ faces—you can see every facial tick, the beads of sweat. You become part of the story.”

It’s that opportunity—to make the audience part of the story—that makes the theatre such a powerful place, she says.

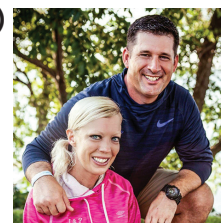
“Theatre brings things that are distant near—it helps audience members imagine themselves in another’s shoes. It can move them to care,” she says.

ALEISA DORNBEIERER-SCHAT

## ALUMNI NOTES

**Pam (Haveman) Ellis** ('97) earned

a Master of Science degree in applied behavior analysis from St. Cloud State University. Ellis is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). She and her husband, Grant, started their own company, ABA Solutions by Pam Ellis, LLC, in 2012, which provides in-home and community-based ABA therapy to children with autism in the greater Ft. Hood, Texas, area. Pam’s husband served in the United States Army and is currently stationed at Ft. Hood. They recently built a home in Morgan’s Point Resort and call Texas home.



**Willem** ('98), **Phillip** ('07), and **Rit** ('02) **VanNieuwenhuyzen**, owners of Vanco Farms in Mount Albion, Prince Edward Island, were recognized by the Pisquid River Enhancement Project for their efforts to prevent soil erosion. The Pisquid River Enhancement Project honors those who actively try to preserve the soil on their farms year-round. In response to receiving the honor, Willem said, “We always try to do the best we can, but it’s nice to be recognized.”

**Kendra (Potgeter) Broekhuis** ('11) recently

published her first book, *Here Goes Nothing, An Introvert’s Reckless Attempt to Love Her Neighbor*. In the book, Broekhuis describes how she stepped outside her comfort zone to connect with the people who lived in her apartment building. The book was published by Harper Collins Christian Publishing and is available for purchase at [www.kendrabroekhuis.com/book](http://www.kendrabroekhuis.com/book).



**Charles Milton**

('11) is a senior personal trainer and manager at Jody’s Gym as well as a middle and high school football coach at Lake Country Christian School in Fort Worth, Texas. Now married with a daughter, Milton looks back fondly on his time at Dordt. “It helped shape me into the man I am today,” says Milton.

